

## How to Throw Basic Pitches: Fastballs, Curve and the Circle Change

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### **FASTBALL**

A four-seam fastball is a variant of the straight fastball. The four-seam fastball is a pitch that is used often by the pitcher to get ahead in the count or when he needs to throw a strike. This type of fastball is intended to have minimal lateral movement.

There are two general ways to throw a four-seam fastball.

The first and most traditional way is to find the horseshoe seam area, or the area where the seams are the farthest apart. Keeping those seams parallel to the body, the pitcher places his index and middle fingers perpendicular to them with the pads on the farthest seam from him. The thumb will then rest underneath the ball, about in the middle of the two fingers. With this grip, the thumb will generally have no seam to rest on.

The second way to throw a four-seam fastball is to take a baseball and find the area where the seams are closest together. Keeping those seams parallel to the body, the pitcher places his index and middle fingers on the baseball perpendicular to the seams.

With this grip, the pitcher will feel more comfortable with those two fingers apart, as they will have more control because of smaller hands. The pads of those two fingers need to rest on the seam that is farthest away from the body, keeping equal pressure with those two fingers. The thumb will then rest underneath the ball about in the middle of the two fingers. This gives some pitchers a little better control physically, if not mentally.

Critically, the thumb needs to rest somewhere on the side to middle of its pad. It's not necessary to push the baseball all the way back into the hand, which will decrease both control and velocity of the baseball.

### **TWO-SEAM FASTBALL**

A two-seam fastball, sometimes called a two-seamer, is a variant of the straight fastball. The two-seam fastball is designed to have more movement than a four seam fastball, and is a pitch to be used while the pitcher is ahead in the count, setting up an off speed pitch, or looking to get a strikeout.

The pitcher grabs a baseball and finds the area on it where the seams are the closest together. Then, the baseball is rotated so that those seams are perpendicular to his body, with the index and middle fingers on each of those seams respectively. Each finger should be touching the seam from the pads or tips to almost the ball of each finger. The thumb should rest underneath the ball in the middle of those two fingers, finding the apex of the horseshoe part of the seam. The thumb needs to rest on that seam from the side to the middle of its pad. This ball will tend to move for the pitcher a little bit depending on velocity, arm slot angle and pressure points of the fingers.



## **CURVEBALL**

The curveball is thrown with a grip and hand motion that induces extra rotation on the ball causing it to "break," and fly in a more exaggerated curve than would be expected. The pitch is slower than a fastball, and this difference in velocity also tends to disrupt the hitter's timing.

Good curveballs often seem to drop sharply with a sharp rotation as they reach the plate, making the batter swing above it. The rotation on a curveball should be in the opposite direction as that of a fastball so the hitter cannot easily distinguish between the pitches; as such, the drop on such a ball should be 12 to 6 on a watch (although many pitchers are successful with a curve ball that breaks down and away from the batter, rather than straight down).



Ideally, a curveball will have the most break when it reaches the plate, thus making it hardest to hit. A curveball that fails to break soon enough is called a "hanging curve" and is much easier to hit. Also, batters anticipating a curveball may try to move forward (closer to the pitcher) in the batter's box to hit the curve before it breaks.

The curveball rotation is produced when the pitcher snaps his wrist downward at the moment of release, causing the ball to "roll" off the pitcher's hand. The palm of the pitcher's hand typically faces up during the follow through after releasing a curveball.

A right-handed pitcher throwing a curveball is toughest on a right-handed batter, as the pitch will ideally break down and away from the hitter, as opposed to inside on his hands (that's what would happen if the right-handed pitcher threw a curve to a left-handed batter). Most batters prefer pitches down and in, instead of down and away, which allows managers to exploit match-ups late in games. If a team has three right-handed hitters coming up in the 8th, the opposing manager will usually go with a right-handed set up man because his curve is going to frustrate those hitters more.

For some reason, left-handed pitchers are more naturally inclined to throw slower, wider breaking curveballs than right-handers. This is apparent by the number of left-handed pitchers who throw high-looping, lower-velocity curveballs. It is speculated that left-handers have better natural pitching mechanics that are more conducive to being able to make the curveball spin more when thrown.

## **CIRCLE CHANGEUP**

A circle changeup is a pitch thrown with a grip that includes a circle formation, hence the name. The circle is formed by putting the index fingertip against the thumb tip, and holding the ball against the palm with the remaining three fingers. This pitch will tend to have little ball rotation. The circle changeup is a variation of the straight changeup.

A circle change can also be used to provide screwball-type movement. By placing the index and ring fingers slightly to the inside (that is, towards the thumb) of the ball and sharply pronating the forearm at release, a pitcher can make the ball move downward and arm-side. A left-handed pitcher's circle change will break down and away from a right-handed batter. Effective circle changeups can reduce the platoon split a pitcher will experience.

When releasing the circle change, keep your wrist straight and follow through fully. If this pitch is left up, it will be hit hard! It is a very effective pitch to throw early in the count to produce a ground ball; it is not a strikeout pitch. By rotating your wrist (before you release) you can change the movement from that of a fastball to that of a curveball-like pitch.

**By Ryan Schnier Pitching Coach Iowa State**